

RUSSIANS-CUBA

WASHINGTON (AP) -- A DEFENSE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN SAID TODAY THERE MIGHT HAVE BEEN A VERY MODEST INCREASE'' IN THE SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN CUBA.

BUT THE SPOKESMAN, THOMAS ROSS, STRESSED THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE OF ANY SOVIET MILITARY FORCE THERE BEYOND THE ADVISORY GROUP WHICH HE SAID HAS BEEN IN CUBA FOR 15 YEARS.

THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THE RUSSIANS HAVE THE MAKINGS OF A MAJOR COMBAT UNIT AND A COMMAND STRUCTURE IN CUBA WAS RAISED AGAIN AT A PENTAGON BRIEFING. THE ISSUE HAS COME UP REPEATEDLY SINCE SEN. RICHARD STONE, D-FLA., MADE THE ALLEGATION LAST MONTH.

ACCORDING TO U.S. INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES, THE RUSSIANS HAVE ABOUT 2,000 MILITARY ADVISERS AND BETWEEN 4,000 AND 6,000 CIVILIAN TECHNICIANS AND ADVISORY PERSONNEL IN CUBA.

THE RUSSIANS HAVE BEEN SENDING WEAPONS, INCLUDING JET FIGHTERS, AND OTHER MILITARY HARDWARE TO CUBA FOR YEARS. U.S. OFFICIALS SAY THIS HAS REQUIRED THE PRESENCE OF SOVIET SPECIALISTS TO SHOW THE CUBANS HOW TO USE AND MAINTAIN THE EQUIPMENT.

IN ADDITION, THE RUSSIANS HAVE BEEN HELPING FIDEL CASTRO'S GOVERNMENT WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND THESE, TOO, HAVE BROUGHT SOVIET ADVISERS TO CUBA SINCE THE EARLY 1960S.

THE NUMBERS OF RUSSIAN ADVISERS, BOTH MILITARY AND CIVILIAN, HAVE FLUCTUATED FROM TIME TO TIME, U.S. INTELLIGENCE OFFICIALS HAVE SAID.

THE ONLY SOVIET MILITARY MEN SERVING IN A COMBAT ROLE AND ACKNOWLEDGED BY U.S. OFFICIALS AS BEING IN CUBA IN RECENT YEARS WERE ABOUT 20 PILOTS WHO WERE SAID IN 1976 TO BE TEMPORARILY FLYING AIR DEFENSE MISSIONS WHILE CUBAN PILOTS WERE FIGHTING IN AFRICA.

THE SOVIET NAVY AND AIR FORCE PERIODICALLY SEND UNITS TO CUBA, WHERE THEY ENGAGE IN LIMITED EXERCISES WITH CUBAN FORCES AND THEN RETURN HOME. THIS HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR MORE THAN 10 YEARS.

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